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A PLAN FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, FURTHER DECENTRALIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION, BROOKLYN, N.Y.

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THIS PLAN CONTAINS LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DECENTRALIZATION OF THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND FOR INCREASED PARENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION. IN PART IT RESPONDS TO AN EARLIER PLAN PROPOSED BY THE MAYOR'S PANEL ON DECENTRALIZATION. THE PRESENT PROPOSAL SUGGESTS THAT THE ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SCHOOLS WHICH THE MAYOR'S PANEL HAS RECOMMENDED WOULD ONLY CREATE "HARMFUL DISORGANIZATION." A MORE EFFECTIVE PLAN WOULD REQUIRE PERMANENT INCREASED STATE AID AND INSTITUTE COORDINATED SCHOOL, HEALTH, HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES. IT IS FELT THAT ALTHOUGH LOCAL CONTROL MIGHT SUCCESSFULLY BE EXERCISED OVER THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM, IT SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO HINDER INTEGRATION, THE MERIT SYSTEM, THE NEW COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM, SCHOOL EVALUATION, AND OTHER CITYWIDE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES. THUS THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS MUST REMAIN ACCOUNTABLE TO THE CENTRAL BOARD. THE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS OUTLINED IN THIS PLAN BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE AUTHORITY OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS, THE TENURE OF EMPLOYEES, THE PROCEDURES FOR THE SELECTION OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, AND THE REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIVE PROVISIONS IN THE PRESENT LAW. FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS NOT REQUIRING LEGISLATION INCLUDE THE SUGGESTION THAT NO ADDITIONAL LOCAL BOARDS OR DISTRICTS BE CREATED, THAT THERE BE CENTRALIZED EXAMINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL, AND THAT THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS BE REORGANIZED AND RETAINED. IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED THAT THE LOCAL BOARDS HAVE FLEXIBILITY IN THE USE OF ALLOCATED FUNDS AND RESOURCES. UNDER THIS PLAN COST AND EVALUATION DATA GATHERED BY THE CENTRAL BOARD WOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO LOCAL BOARDS FOR DETERMINATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL PRIORITIES. (LB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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BOARD OF EDUCATION
CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

A PLAN FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

(Further Decentralization of the Public Schools)

March 7, 1968

Last spring, after long and urgent pleas by the Board of Education and the Mayor, the New York State Legislature provided temporary financial assistance to meet our school needs. In doing so, it requested the Mayor to submit a plan to encourage community and parent participation by the creation and redevelopment of educational policy and administrative units in the New York City School District. The Mayor has submitted such a plan. It deals, in great measure, with the administrative structure. We believe that the advantages of flexibility and increased local responsibility which we favor can be achieved without the dangers and risks involved in a drastic change of administrative structure which seeks to give basic control of many school districts to different groups. Our Board's long-time commitment to decentralization and parent involvement, as well as our experience of city school needs, leads us to submit the following plan for consideration by the State Legislature.

I. PERMANENT INCREASED STATE AID

The primary need of any new legislation is for permanent additional financial help from the state to meet New York City's needs. Otherwise, any change of structure in decentralization would merely transfer powers and responsibilities from the city Board of Education that now suffers frustrations resulting from lack of funds and facilities to many local school boards that would also suffer frustrations for the same reasons.

A change in structure is one of many problems that we all face in our efforts for better education. Schools are cramped for space. Tens of thousands of children are on short time and in overcrowded schools. Our class sizes are too large. Many teachers and supervisors need additional training to meet current urban problems. Not enough books and materials are adapted to urban problems and needs. The flight of the middle class, the influx each year of tens of thousands of deprived children, and the annual mobility of hundreds of thousands of children aggravate these problems. They demand different techniques and more money. There is an urgent need for better coordination with other basic services such as health, housing, employment and recreation opportunities. These and other problems must be attacked and solved. Simply changing the school structure cannot resolve these problems.

But more flexibility of school operations and a more effective interrelationship of teachers, parents and community are also essential ingredients.

II. THE NEED FOR CHANGE

During the past three years, our Board has increased decentralization and has already given to the parent and community-based local school boards the maximum power now permitted by law. In addition, we are in the first year of experimentation with three demonstration districts governed by locally elected governing boards to learn lessons that could lead to additional changes.

The specific and difficult educational question is at what level — school, district or central — can particular functions or responsibilities be best performed in order to improve education for the child and yet permit the highest degree of flexibility in the school system consistent with our social and budgetary needs.

Our lay Board of Education which represents the public believes that certain restrictions that now exist in state law should be removed. In some areas specific powers should be given to local school boards by law. In addition, the Board of Education should have the power to delegate other powers to local school boards as circumstances warrant. Such a program would permit an orderly and effective route that would avoid the pitfalls of inflexible and untried procedures.

"The least specific legislation will be the best legislation" aptly characterizes the approach. It was well summarized in an editorial in the *New York Times* on December 1, 1967, which noted the importance of permitting experimentation and then cogently stated:

> "It would do no good for the legislation merely to replace old rigidities with new straitjackets. Flexibility is essential."

The notion of "local control of education" through many additional administrative units rests upon ideas which are

not relevant to the urban situation. New York City is not a collection of towns or villages. As our society grows more complex, the need is to retain the basic virtues of local interest and local directional control to the maximum degree that is feasible and yet assure the successful pursuit of broader social interests through centralized direction and control. Effort for more community involvement must not harm the basic forces and conditions that permit integration, quality education, the merit system in the teaching profession and in promotions, cohesiveness in a single society rather than separatism, and ultimately the high quality of our public school system. This flexible balance can be better achieved through permissive legislation rather than set procedures hardened into law.

III. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION

The ultimate objective of any administrative plan should be the improvement of instruction. The Board's plan envisions giving to the local school boards maximum flexibility with respect to educational programs and direction without encumbering them with complex administrative services which are not directly related to the educational program. It will avoid costly and duplicative supportive services in the individual districts which would drain money away from the instructional program. The districts will be free to concentrate on education.

We propose that the local school boards should select the chief educational officer; have consultative responsibilities in the selection of principals in their districts, and determine the priority of educational programs as well as the allocation of certain funds to fit the particular local needs.

In this single city there must continue to be a relationship of accountability between the local school boards and the Board of Education so that city-wide educational policies, programs and standards can be carried out effectively. A similar relationship must continue to exist between the district superintendents and the Superintendent of Schools in terms of the general administration of the school system.

On the basis of these principles, we propose that the local school boards be given statutory and delegated powers for the elementary and intermediate schools in their districts. In view of the new comprehensive high school program and the inter-district and inter-borough enrollment of high school students, it is essential that the Board of Education administer the high schools with procedures developed with the districts for the utmost articulation between intermediate schools and high schools.

Evaluation of all aspects of the operation of the school system must remain the responsibility of the Board of Education in terms of objectives, procedures and effectiveness. The Board's evaluation resources will be used to assist the districts in the improvement of their own programs by disseminating information of effective programs and practices throughout the city and by providing the districts with tools for determining the effectiveness of their own programs.

It is our intention to monitor this plan as it proceeds in order to make whatever modifications are necessary to accomplish our purposes — the improvement of instruction and closer and more meaningful involvement of parents and community.

The structure outlined below seeks to set the foundation for a decentralized and responsive system. It would permit adaptation to the felt needs and expressed desires of most of the communities themselves. It would permit flexibility and experimentation. It would be limited only by what seems to be the most effective procedures for securing maximum educational efficiency, local accountability in significant areas, and maximum involvement of parents, teachers, and community.

IV. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

A brief description of our legislative proposals follows:

(1) *Power of Local School Boards* — These boards should be made operating bodies with the right to exercise any powers granted to them by law and delegated to them by the Board of Education. This would require the elimination of the present restriction in the Education Law, Section 2564, which makes them "advisory" only.

(2) *Appointment of District Superintendents* — The local school boards should be given specific authority to select and hire, on a contract basis, subject to compliance with state certification.

(3) *Tenure of Employees* — Local school boards should be given specific authority to grant or deny permanent tenure on the recommendation of the district superintendent to the local school board. Any person denied tenure by the local school board shall have the right to appeal to the Board of Education. In the case of employees with tenure, the district superintendent should have the right to prefer charges to the local school board, which shall make recommendations to the Board of Education for action.

(4) *Elementary School Principals* — Amend the law so as to permit elementary school principals to be appointed on the basis of a qualifying examination rather than a competitive examination, thereby permitting appointment in a manner similar to the junior high school and high school principals.

(5) *Delegation of Other Powers* — The Board of Education should be vested with the authority to delegate any of its powers to local school boards as, from time to time, it shall determine to be in the best interests of education, and under such appropriate safeguards as to assure the maintenance of minimum city-wide and state standards and policies.

Budget Authority — The Board of Education plans to give to local school boards specific authority to determine their own priorities consistent with city-wide standards within the funds or resources allocated to them by the Board of Education.

(6) *Selection Procedures for the Board of Education* — Our Board recognizes the primary right of the Legislature to determine how members of the Board of Education should be appointed. The present selection panel from which the Mayor makes appointments is set forth in the law. It is our view that it is desirable to increase the panel by permitting the Mayor to add up to four additional members to reflect the diversity of views and backgrounds of the people of New York City.

(7) *Removal of Inconsistent Provisions in the Law* — Various sections of the law would inhibit the ability of the Board of Education to delegate authority to local school boards as noted above and would prevent the Board of Education from exercising the flexibility in operating its own affairs that it requires to meet the needs of our school system. They should be repealed.

V. AREAS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE LEGISLATION

The Board of Education now has the power to take action in other areas covered in various proposals submitted to the Legislature. Because no change in the law is required and because of the interest focused on these other questions which affect local involvement, we are setting forth our views on these points.

Number and Nature of Local School Boards

There is no legislative restriction on the number of such boards nor the manner in which they shall be selected. Two years ago, our Board increased the number from 25 to 30. More recently, we have created three other areas with a smaller number of schools as demonstration projects. We continue to look favorably on educationally and socially sound changes in the number and nature of such boards.

We believe that there should be no immediate increase in the present number of school districts. If new and additional responsibilities are given to local school boards, either under the legislation we propose or by delegation, we believe it inadvisable to change the number and constitution of districts at the same time. The success of such new duties and responsibilities would be enhanced if they were placed in the hands of the present boards with people who have built up a body of experience, who have learned to work together, and who know their districts and their schools. However, the Board will review the method of selection of local school board members including the possible direct election of some members of the Board so that they may reflect the changing community needs of this city.

Examination and Appointment of Personnel

It is now generally agreed that there must be a central agency to preserve the legal and constitutional requirement that all appointments be made on the basis of merit and fitness and wherever practicable, on a competitive basis. We plan to continue our present methods of consultation with local school boards regarding the appointment of principals.

In order to meet the needs of our city, teacher certifications, appointments and assignments should be processed and made centrally. The assignment of all teachers to districts should be in accordance with the provisions of an objective index and priorities which take into account educational retardation measurements established by the Board of Education to assure equitable distribution of available personnel. Districts should be permitted to encourage candidates for teaching positions to apply for assignment in their districts. Teachers referred by districts to the central agency for certification and assignment should have first priority for assignment to such district as possible within the index and priority provisions.

Board of Examiners

In 1967, legislation reconstituted the Board of Examiners in accordance with the request of the Board of Education. The number of examiners was reduced; their operations were streamlined; important improvements in speeding up and simplifying the examination process have been made; others are being studied. Accordingly, we believe that the Board of Examiners, as reorganized, should be retained to conduct the necessary examining functions of new teachers and candidates for promotion.

Curriculum

In a city with a population as diverse as New York and characterized as it is by unusual mobility, it is essential to encourage innovation in the curriculum. At the same time, it is essential to maintain basic and uniform city and state standards.

Local districts may adapt curriculum and methodology to their needs and choose textbooks and materials of instruction which meet city and state standards. The central agency should have the responsibility for evaluating and testing the effectiveness of the district educational programs, and should take measures to acquaint the city with the success and failures of local programs. Education in any part of the city continues to remain the concern and responsibility of the entire city.

Budget

Through the development of the Planning-Programming-Budgeting System, our Board is now organizing cost and evaluation data in a manner most useful to the decision-makers. It is an effective tool that will permit more informed decisions and narrow the areas of uncertainty. It permits current and long-range plans to be made regarding expected needed resources for any and all programs.

The Board of Education will also make available the data of cost and evaluation resulting from its program-planning-budget procedures. Given the legal power to delegate, this data would be the basis of local school board determination of priorities in the instructional program.

The Board of Education plans initially to allocate personnel and other resources to the districts for the various elements in district programs. Local school boards should have the right to use the resources allocated to them in a flexible manner. Thus, local school boards should have local powers and local flexibilities in four areas:

(1) To select from the optional programs presented to them by the Board of Education;

(2) To assign their own priorities in those programs;

(3) To substitute other approved programs within the allotted funds; and

(4) To innovate their own programs from additional monies available, subject to Board approval.

In addition, each year the Board of Education plans to allocate a lump sum to each district to be expended for maintenance, repairs and painting, books, supplies, instructional materials, equipment or unusual needs and emergency replacements. Local school districts should have the right to determine the usage of these funds within the purposes stated or for innovation and experimentation.

If a local school board wishes to use its allocated resources in any other manner (as, for example, transfer of funds from personnel to maintenance), it would submit its proposal to the Board of Education for review. The purpose of such review would be to assure adherence to city and state minimum standards. This review will also offer another opportunity for the Board of Education and local school boards to consider the evaluative data made available by the Planning-Programming-Budgeting System.

In other words, the local school boards would use the allocated resources and funds for the maintenance of the minimum state, city and contractual obligations. Beyond that point, they should have flexibility in the use of funds and resources.

With respect to the capital budget for school construction, local school boards would continue to recommend needs for their particular districts.

VI. THE ORDERLY DELEGATION OF POWERS

Our Board makes the proposals outlined above because of our conviction that a massive experiment in recasting the largest school system in the world in one swoop as proposed by the Mayor would cause unnecessary and harmful disorganization. This is particularly true where potential cost is concededly of large magnitude and where direct relationship between the proposal and the assurance of quality education is obscure. Reorganizing the administrative structure in New York City so as to duplicate suburban or rural school systems does not necessarily answer the problem either of education or meaningful involvement by parents and community in a large and diverse city. While moving toward further decentralization in an orderly manner, we will be profiting from the experience with the on-going demonstration school projects.

The most effective decentralization is that which reaches into the individual school and the individual classroom. The principal, who is the educational leader of the school, should be granted maximum responsibility and flexibility. The principal and teachers have the major responsibility for strengthening the ties between the schools, the parents and the community. In most parts of the city this relationship exists with active parents' associations as well as a systematic and continuing procedure for involving parents and others. There must be increased concentration of parental and community involvement in this area. There must be personal sympathetic relationships with the parents of all school children.

Our aim is to permit the most effective use of limited resources, assure central standards and means of enforcing them, as well as continued orderly delegation of powers. The legislative program which we propose together with permissive legislation to achieve that balance is more in the public interest than mandated procedures hardened into law.

Candor requires recognition of the fact that the schools alone cannot solve the social problems that face all large cities and that administrative reorganization alone will not change what is going on in the classroom. The essential ingredient to which we must all dedicate ourselves is the fullest cooperation of all forces involved: parents, community, teachers, supervisors and public officials in our city, state and nation.

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